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ABSTRACT

The focus of a study was to determine the role of continuing education students in the selection process for instructors. A 65.8 percent response rate from administrative heads at 38 Canadian universities was achieved on a mailed questionnaire. Study results indicated that continuing education students have little impact on the process of acquiring faculty. Their primary involvement was in the evaluation of the selected instructors, which may have an impact on the rehiring but not on the initial selection process. (YLB)

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STUDENTS' ROLE IN THE SELECTION OF INSTRUCTORS OF CONTINUING EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The student demonstrations of the sixties have resulted in student representation in university governance being a norm in the 1980's. However, there appears to be one sector of the university structure that does not allow for student involvement, particularly in the realm of faculty recruitment and selection . This sector is the division of Continuing Education, which primarily responds to the learning needs of adults. The focus of this study was to determine the role of continuing education students in the selection process for instructors . A 65.8 percent response rate, from a total of 38 Canadian universities, was achieved on a mailed questionnaire. It is apparent from the data that continuing education students have an indirect role in the administrative decision-making process of selection, but it is de facto. The primary involvement of continuing education students is in the evaluation of the selected instructor, which may have an impact on re-hiring but not on the initial selection process.

INTRODUCTION

Student participation in university governance is now an accepted establishment. Although, students are a minority on Senates, and Boards of Regents or Governors in Canadian universities , students are nonetheless representing the student population on these major governing structures. Thus, students have a formal vehicle for voicing their concerns on issues confronting universities. Students also play a significant role in the area of instructional evaluation.

The use of student ratings to evaluate an instructor has precipitated numerous debates on the validity of such information and on what use should be made of the outcomes. Murray (1), Centra (2) and Seldin (3) have provided arguments for and against student ratings and the methological problems involved in their use. Regardless of the flaws, student ratings are in widespread use and administrative decisions are being made on the basis of this source of information (4).

The continuing education division in universities appear to be the only area where student representation is not utilized in the selection of faculty (5). The concern of this study was to determine what role the Continuing Education student plays in the selection process for instructors of continuing education courses in Canadian universities.

A questionnaire was sent to the administrative head of the continuing education division in 38 Canadian universities. A 65.8 percent response rate was achieved after two follow up letters. The continuing education divisions were identified from a directory of the Canadian Association for University Continuing Education. Nested within this population was a subsample of deans/directors of continuing education in Ontario universities, as a comparison to the national population. The questionnaire sought responses on the role of continuing education students in each component of the selection process, namely, recruitment, actual selection, orientation and evaluation. The results for each component are reported in the subsequent sections.

Recruitment

Table 1 reports the percentage distribution of the Deans by the three most frequently used recruiting resources for instructors of continuing education courses. It can be seen that 81% of the Ontario deans and 71% of the other Canadian deans used personal contacts at least "most of the time." The next two most prominent sources for recruiting instructors were "leaders in the community" and "individuals submitting course proposals" (would-be course instructors). An interesting finding was that deans rarely used the media (newspapers, television, professional journals) to advertise for instructors. Therefore, the pool of possible instructors seems to be extremely limited. Furthermore, since continuing education divisions are a part of the university , it would be reasonable to infer that the majority of a dean's personal contacts are university or academic personnel. If this is true, then the pool of instructors has essentially been pre-selected. This raises the question of whether divisions of continuing education are being used as training grounds for graduate students, who are still working on their doctorate degree, which has become the sine qua non of the full-time faculty. This would introduce a bias toward recruiting instructors on the basis of subject competence ,as opposed to some other criterion.

TABLE 1

Number and Percentage Distribution of the Deans by Recruiting Sources Reported

Source/Group	N	Percentage					
		Always	Most of the time	Occasionally	Never	Non-Response	Total
Personal Contacts:							
Ontario	11	9	73	9	0	9	100
Other Canadian	14	14	57	8	0	21	100
Leaders in community:							
Ontario	11	0	28	36	0	36	100
Other Canadian	14	0	14	36	0	50	100
Course proposals:							
Ontario	11	0	36	18	0	46	100
Other Canadian	14	0	21	28	9	42	100

Support for subject competence as a bias can be seen from the data of Table 2, which rank orders the criteria for recruitment, as reported by the deans. Criteria were ranked according to the number of times they were reported in each group as being "very important". "Knowledge of subject" tops the list, and "teaching experience" and "knowledge of adults" account for less than "personality" or "practical experience". Thus, it appears that the knowledge of adults, who are the prime targets of continuing eduation programs, does not play an important role in the recruitment of instructors. This is not surprising but does infer that knowledge about the differences between adults and the newly graduated secondary school students are either unimportant in recruiting instructors or that these differences have yet to have an impact on this administrative process.

TABLE 2

Ranking of Recruitment Criteria Reported by the Deans as "Very Important" (1=highest)

Criteria	Ranking Ontario	(N)	Other Canadian	(N)
Knowledge of subject	1	(10)	1	(10)
Personality	2	(4)	2	(6)
Practical experience	2	(4)	2	(6)
Teaching experience	4	(2)	5	(4)
Knowledge of adults	4	(2)	4	(5)
Educational qualifications	6	(1)	5	(4)
Job position	NR	(0)	7	(1)

NR = Not ranked

Selection

In selection of possible instructors, the most frequent source of information about the candidates, is from an interview, while references and resumes play a minor role. This is consistent with the criteria specified by the deans as being used in the recruiting stage, namely, subject competence, personality and practical experience. All three can be adequately assessed via interviews. However, there appears to be no role for the student in the interviewing process, since there is no utilization of a committee structure to select from potential instructors. Thus, the division of continuing education appears to be one of the few frontiers within the university where students do not have a direct input on the selection of instructors.

The issue this raises is whether students should have a role to play in the selection process, particularly in light of the short term nature of the position that the instructor fills, i.e. on a per course basis. Concomitant with this issue is the question why peers are not used in the selection process, which is an entrenched practice for full-time faculty.

Table 3 shows the ranking of selection criteria reported by the deans as "important" or "very important". At the top of the list is subject competence. This does not infer that subject competence is the major determinant for selection, but rather a major requirement to be selected. However, it does show that knowledge of adults or adult education does not play an important role in the selection of instructors for programs that are clearly oriented toward the adult community. These results on the recruitment and selection of instructors for continuing education lead to the deduction that on-the-job training with respect to knowledge of adults and adult education is a responsibility the division may see itself as responding to, rather than as a recruitment or selection expectation. In order to clarify whether this deduction was true, a number of questions were asked about the orientation stage of the selection process.

TABLE 3

Ranking of Selection Criteria Reported by the Deans as "Important" or "Very Important" (1=highest)

Criteria	Ranking			
	Ontario	(N)	Other Canadian	(N)
Subject knowledge	1	(10)	1	(10)
Practical experience	2	(9)	3	(8)
Recommendations	2	(9)	3	(8)
Personality	3	(8)	2	(9)
Teaching experience	3	(8)	2	(9)
Course proposal	3	(8)	2	(9)
Educational background	4	(7)	2	(9)
University education	5	(6)	4	(7)
Faculty member	6	(4)	6	(3)
Company individual works for	7	(3)	8	(0)
Where degree(s) obtained	8	(1)	5	(4)
Research Experience	8	(1)	7	(1)
Publications	9	(0)	6	(3)

Orientation for Newly Hired Instructors

The deans were asked about the existence of faculty meetings, orientation programs and in-service training programs. Only three institutions indicated that regular faculty meetings of the continuing education teaching staff were held. Twenty-seven percent of Ontario deans and 36% of the rest reported that they had an orientation program for new instructors, but only 18% of the former and 21% of the latter stated that in-service teacher training was also available. Ironically, eight deans commented that finding well-trained persons was a significant problem and ten others reported it was a slight problem in recruiting instructors. The lack of availability of well-trained personnel appears to provide a greater problem for deans than pay scales, course schedules, or the population of their respective communities.Thus, in-service training is not seen as a responsibility by the majority of continuing education divisions.

The deans' perception of a problem in recruiting well-trained instructors raises the question "How do the Deans determine the performance of the instructors"? To answer this question, information was gathered on the evaluation of instructors.

Evaluation: The Only Role of The Student

Table 4 shows the ranking of evaluation models as reported by the deans as "important" or "most important". The only real difference between the two groups is in the greater use of informal student opinion by the deans in Ontario. This may reflect a different strategy of evaluation or a greater commitment to some form of student participation. Since adult learners usually leave a course or a program,if they are dissatisfied,without indicating why then this maybe the only means by which the deans can obtain attrition information.

All Ontario deans and 79% of the rest, do some form of istructor evaluation, either foramlly or informally. This finding ,together with the reported lack of in-service training suggests that those instructors who do not satisfactorily pass evaluation may simply not be re-hired. This type of quality assurance process may result in endless turnover, expenses, course discontinuities, and program instability. It can also, over time, affect the reputation of the institution.

The results of each facet of the selection process support the finding that the only element involving students is in the evaluation of selected instructors. Therefore, it appears that continuing education students are only a source for information for administrators of continuing education divisions and not represented on administrative bodies to decide who should teach.

TABLE 4

Ranking of evaluation Models Reported by the Deans as "Important" or "Very Important"

METHOD	RANKING			
	Ontario	(N)	Other Canadian	(N)
Student ratings	1	(8)	1	(8)
Dean's Director's evaluation	2	(5)	2	(6)
Informal student opinions	1	(8)	2	(6)

Summary and Confirmation

The finding that 76% of the deans use personal contacts as their primary source for recruiting candidates to teach accords with Hoffman's report (6) of the personnel practices of continuing eduation divisions in colleges and universities in the state of Texas. Although Knox (7) justifies this type of newtwork, personal contacts may account for the fact that 72% of the deans reported that one of their problems was in recruiting well-trained personnel.

Draper and Barer-Stein (8) suggest that orientation and in-service programs are essential for the prevention of instructional related problems, and frequent meetings should be held between the continuing education administrator and the continuing education instructors. However, inferring from the results of this study, there is a distinct impression that once the instructors are hired, their only association with the university is through their students in the classroom.

Interestingly, instructors of continuing education have only one role, namely teaching, and yet there does not appear to be any incentive programs for recognizing outstanding teaching. This may not be as necessary as for full-time (tenured) faculty (9,10), but does suggest a need to investigate the hypothesis that if an incentive program was introduced whether the quality of teaching, based upon student evaluations, would be significantly changed.

The finding that evaluation of instructors in continuing education divisions is primarily via the use of student ratings supports similar findings by Centra (2).

Figure 1 depicts the instructor acquisition process as reported by the deans of continuing education. It is evident that the administrators of continuing education have total control of the selection process. Effectively they accumulate information, analyse it and use it to make decisions. In this, they have more direct authority than administrators of other divisions of the university.

The results of this study indicate that continuing education students have little impact on the acquisition process of faculty.This is contrary to the full-time students ,who are actively involed in the selection process for full-time faculty. The only role that continuing education students play is as a source of information for rating the instructor.

Figure 1. Components of the instructor acquisition process and primary methods used in each component based on data.

STAGE	Recruitment----->	Selection------>	Hiring--------->	Evaluation
		↑		↑
METHODS	Personal contacts	Interviews		Students' informal or formal rating
PERSONS INVOLVED	Deans/ co-ordinators	Deans/ co-ordinators candidate	Deans/ co-ordinators instructors	Instructors students

Conclusions

The involvement of students in the selection process is limited to only the evaluation stage. This appears to be counterproductive to the overall process of selection based on the fact that no remediation is provided for those instructors who are deemed inadequate by the students. Thus, continuing education students appear to play only a judgemental role in the administrative decisions on the acquisition of instructors for continuing education courses.

The results of this study indicate a high degree of homogenity among deans of continuing education with respect to the selection process for instructors of continuing education courses in Ontario as well as other Canadian universities. Furthermore, the results indicate that divisions of continuing education have complete autonomy with respect to personnel practices. This maybe an important aspect to the survival of the institution, in a time of retrenchment, so that continuing education is unencumbered by policy. If continuing education divisions were expected to conform to the hiring procedures for full-time faculty then the continuing education divisions'ability to respond quickly might be severely limited. This limitation could decrease the continuing education division's potential, as a source of income for the university.

A question which is raised by this study is "Does the lack of student involvement in the governance of continuing education within the university environment threaten the quest for quality?" This study points to the need for empirical research into the relationship between quality and student participation.

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